

5/10/22 Tuesday

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US Senate Confirms Africa CDC Chief John Nkengasong as Global AIDS Coordinator

Addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in the Third World has faced many of the same challenges as addressing HIV/AIDS, namely, the steep price of high-quality drugs and the intellectual property rights preventing cheaper alternatives from being made outside of richer countries. Dr. John Nkengasong, the former head of the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention, has been confirmed as head of Washington's public health program aimed at fighting HIV/AIDS. The Senate [voted on May 6](#) to make Nkengasong the next US ambassador-at-large and coordinator of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), as well as other efforts to stem the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), around the globe. Nkengasong will also work closely with his old agency, UNAIDS, to tackle the epidemic outbreak, especially in Africa.

"This is great news for the world. John Nkengasong is an inspired choice to lead PEPFAR," Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS, said in a [Friday news release](#).

"He is one of the world's leading experts on HIV and pandemic preparedness and has practical experience on how to advance efforts to end AIDS amidst the COVID pandemic. We need the kind of bold thinking and commitment that he has brought throughout his career," she added.

African Health Leader

Before his confirmation, the Cameroonian virologist was the first head of the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) after its formation by the African Union in 2016. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020, he became a special envoy to Africa for the secretary-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN-connected global health agency, and coordinated Africa's COVID-19 response.

[Writing in Nature](#) in 2019, just months before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Nkengasong argued that African nations needed to buttress their national public health institutions (NPHI) and empower local leadership in order to head off future disease outbreaks.

"Waiting for emergency help from the West costs lives, health and resources," Nkengasong wrote. "African leaders are starting to take ownership of investments in their citizens' health, but fewer than 15 countries on the continent currently have institutions that can perform the functions of an effective NPHI, such as disease surveillance linked with a diagnostic laboratory, and the capacity to activate a rapid-response team for outbreaks and serve as an operation center in public-health emergencies."

PEPFAR was started in 2003 by then-US President George W. Bush, and since then the US has pumped more than \$100 billion into research, education, and resource distribution aimed at preventing the spread of HIV and developing effective treatments - or even a cure - for the disease.

Spread of a Deadly Virus

According to [WHO statistics](#), HIV has killed between 27 and 49 million people globally since the first outbreak was detected in 1981 in the United States.

While the US was the early center of the outbreak, by the late 1990s it had shifted to Africa. In 2020, there were between 30 and 45 million people living with HIV, more than two-thirds of whom were in Africa. That year, between 480,000 and 1 million people died of AIDS complications and 1 to 2 million people became newly infected by HIV.

The virus is spread by bodily fluids, most commonly through sexual intercourse or by sharing implements, such as needles. HIV can take some time to take effect, but when it does, it attacks the victim's immune system, degrading their body's natural defenses and making even a slight infection potentially deadly - a condition called AIDS. Early research and treatment for AIDS was lacking because of social stigmas against its primary victims: gay and bisexual men and transgender women.

Since the mid-1990s, effective antiretroviral drug cocktails have been developed that can suppress an HIV infection, but which are extremely expensive - and thus unavailable to poor people anywhere on the globe, but especially in Africa. More recently, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) drugs have been developed [that can block HIV infection](#), but are similarly prohibitively expensive.

As a result of their price, treatment that existed was not available in Africa for years after its development, and the annual death rate from AIDS complications did not reach its zenith until 2006, when [2.9 million people died](#) from AIDS complications in that year alone. As happened [during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), powerful social movements arose to demand waivers for international agreements protecting patents for the necessary drugs, which were opposed by Western pharmaceutical giants. This situation, in part, led to the creation of PEPFAR.

In 2020, 73% of those infected with HIV were receiving antiretroviral therapy, according to the WHO. UNAIDS has set a goal for 2030 [known as "95-95-95"](#): 95% of people with HIV know their status; 95% of people with HIV are receiving treatment; and 95% of people receiving treatment are achieving viral suppression using PrEP.

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That'll Glue, Pig: Actor James Cromwell Superglues Himself to Starbucks Counter Over Cow's Milk Use

It's not every day an 82-year-old, Emmy Award-winning actor joins a political protest - it's far rarer that he shows up and then superglues himself to something.

Tuesday was that rare day, however, for one Manhattan Starbucks cafe when James Cromwell showed up with several other activists from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to demand the company stop charging customers more for non-dairy milk, such as soy or oat milk, than for dairy milk.

"Save the planet, save the cows - end the vegan upcharge now!" the activists chanted. They also carried signs and wore t-shirts with slogans like "free the animals."

"This is how you get an animal rights message to STICK!" PETA said in a tweet containing a video of the protest.

At one point, Cromwell and another activist glued one hand each to the countertop near the cashiers. Despite their chanting and gluing, business was not significantly interrupted by their protest, and customers continued to place orders.

"Starbucks claims that it wants to be more sustainable, but it discourages customers from choosing sustainable products," Cromwell said at the protest. "My friends at PETA and I are calling on Starbucks to stop punishing kind and environmentally conscious customers for choosing plant milks."

"Up to 95% of Asian Americans and 80% of African Americans cannot digest cow's milk. Starbucks makes them pay more!" he added.

The Seattle-based coffee house giant ended the price discrepancy in the UK [at the end of last year](#), but the practice has persisted in the US, where adding plant-based milk to your drink could cost you up to \$0.50 more. Starbucks offers several types of plant-based milk, including coconut, soy, oat, and almond milk.

A Starbucks spokesperson told the [Associated Press](#) that the company respects customers' right to voice their opinions "so long as it does not disrupt our store operations."

After New York police arrived, Cromwell used nail polish remover to un-glue himself and was escorted outside, along with the other demonstrators. The whole affair lasted about 38 minutes, according to [a livestream of the protest](#) posted on Facebook.

Cromwell has been protesting in defense of animals since 2013, when he was arrested for interrupting a University of Wisconsin Board of Regents meeting over alleged mistreatment of cats on campus. In addition to animal advocacy, Cromwell has also demonstrated against the use of natural gas.

The 82-year-old actor has starred in a number of prominent film roles over several decades, including as sheep farmer Arthur Hoggette in "Babe"; warp drive inventor Zefram Cochrane in "Star Trek: First Contact"; and prison warden Hal Moores in "The Green Mile." He won a Prime Time Emmy award in 2013 for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Limited Series or Movie for his portrayal of mad scientist and secret Nazi war criminal Dr. Arthur Arden/Hans Grüper in "American Horror Story: Asylum."

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As US Gas Prices Hit Record High, Biden Says His Plan to Mitigate Costs is Better Than GOP's

Speaking at the White House on Tuesday, US President Joe Biden said, "I want every American to know that I am taking inflation very seriously." However, in outlining his plan to tackle gas prices and the depreciating value of the dollar, the president offered few solutions.

"My plan is to lower everyday costs for hardworking families and lower the deficit by asking large corporations and the wealthiest Americans to not engage in price gouging and to pay their fair share in taxes," Biden told reporters.

He also pointed to the largest-ever release of oil from the strategic petroleum reserve as part of an internationally coordinated effort to alleviate oil demand. He further claimed US [domestic oil and gas](#) production is “approaching record levels,” and noted his administration would for the first time allow the sale of gasoline using home-grown biofuels - a change he announced [nearly a month ago](#).

Apart from that, however, Biden only said that the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, has the most power to reduce inflation.

“[W]hile I’ll never interfere with the Fed’s judgments, decisions, or tell them what they have to do - they’re independent; they’re independent - I believe that inflation is our top economic challenge right now, and I think they do, too,” Biden said. “So the Fed should do its job and it will do its job, I’m convinced, with that in mind.”

Last week, the Fed [voted to hike interest rates](#) by their largest single increase in more than two decades in an attempt to rein in inflation and prevent the US economy from burning itself out over the summer, which economists are increasingly worried could happen.

Biden tried to contrast his own plan with the Republicans’, saying the conservative alternative would “increase taxes on middle-class families and let billionaires and large companies off the hook as they raise prices and reap profits at record amounts.”

“The bottom line is this: Americans have a choice right now between two paths reflecting two very different sets of values,” Biden said. “My plan attacks inflation and lowers the deficit ... The other path is the ultra MAGA plan,” using the acronym for former US President Donald Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again.”

“The MAGA Republicans are counting on you to be so frustrated by the pace of progress they have done everything they can to slow down that you will hand power to them so they can enact their extreme agenda,” he added.

Record-High Gas Prices

Biden’s words come as the American Automobile Association (AAA) reported the [highest-ever nationwide average](#) gas prices: an average of \$4.37 per gallon for the week starting on Tuesday, with that price varying by nearly a dollar above and below the average in different parts of the country.

He was also speaking a day before the anticipated April report on consumer prices from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The data is used to calculate price differences in consumer goods as compared to the same period last year - the difference, when the price increases, is inflation. In 2022, inflation has trended upward [from a 40-year high](#) in January of 7.5%; in its report on March 2022, the [BLS found an 8.5% cost increase](#) over 2021.

Two major factors have contributed to rising inflation: cost increases associated with lockdowns and other safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in oil prices, which is closely related to the first factor. Driving oil prices even higher, however, has been a US boycott of Russian petroleum products in retaliation for Russia’s special operation in Ukraine that began in February. The European Union is debating a similar boycott.

Biden has tried to cast the price increases as the fault of Russian President Vladimir Putin, labeling high gas prices “Putin’s price hike.” However, polls show Americans aren’t buying it. The most recent survey published by conservative pollster [Rasmussen on April 27](#) found that beliefs about the importance of rising gas prices were essentially unchanged since November 2021, but that a majority (51%) of American voters surveyed held the president responsible for

higher fuel prices. Another 26% blamed oil companies for the price hike, while just 15% blamed Putin.

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Beijing Accuses US of Trying to 'Write Off' One China Principle With Taiwan Relations Website Change

The US has used Russia's special operation in Ukraine to spread fears in Taiwan of an imminent Chinese invasion, encouraging Taipei to buy even more US weapons after penning one deal after another in recent years, totaling several billion dollars. The autonomous island figures centrally in the US' anti-China strategy.

[On Monday, Sputnik reported](#) that the US State Department's website about US-Taiwan relations had recently been rewritten to omit and downplay certain language about that relationship. Deletions included the phrase "the United States does not support Taiwan independence," and passages explaining how their "robust unofficial relationship" works in plain terms were reworked into obscure references to diplomatic documents and moved further down the page, coming after lines hailing Taiwanese democracy and US-Taiwan friendship. Beijing hit back on Tuesday morning, calling on the Biden administration to "stop engaging in political manipulation of Taiwan-related issues and containing China with the Taiwan question." "There is only one China in the world," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Zhao Lijian told reporters](#) on Tuesday.

"Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory. The Chinese government is the sole legal government representing the whole of China. This is a universally-recognized norm governing international relations and common consensus of the international community. History brooks no falsification, facts cannot be denied, and right and wrong should not be distorted," he said.

"The US has made solemn commitments on the Taiwan question and the one-China principle in the three China-US joint communiqués," Zhao continued. "The US' latest modification of the fact sheet is a trick to obscure and write off the one-China principle. Such political manipulation of the Taiwan question and the attempt to change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait will hurt the US itself."

Unofficial Friendship

Taiwan has been de facto autonomous since 1949, when the Chinese republican government was defeated in the civil war on the mainland and the socialist People's Republic of China was founded in Beijing. Both governments claim to be the rightful Chinese government, but all but a handful of small, US-dominated countries have switched their recognition from Taipei to Beijing in the decades since - [including the United States](#) in 1979.

Despite the shift, Washington has continued to funnel Taiwan sufficient weaponry to defend its autonomy. In recent years, as a pro-independence faction came to power in Taipei and the US switched its global strategy toward "great power competition" with Russia and China, the pace of that support has sharply increased, and since Russia launched its special operation in Ukraine in February, it has [accelerated still further](#).

March 2022 saw one US delegation after another, official and unofficial, visit the island, and the US Navy has performed several transits of the Taiwan Strait separating the island from the mainland - all actions Beijing considers provocative.

Nothing's Changed?

It's unclear if US policy is expected to change as a result of the reworded web page. One theory about the edits is that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected to speak on May 5, the day of the edits, but his speech was postponed due to the diplomat contracting COVID-19. However, US and Taiwanese officials have insisted that US policy remains unchanged.

Ed Dunn, a spokesperson for the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the de facto US embassy on the island, [told local media on Wednesday](#) that Washington's "One-China" policy is guided by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the three Joint Communiques and the Six Assurances made with China - a recapitulation of existing policy phraseology.

"Our commitment to Taiwan is rock-solid and contributes to the maintenance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and within the region," Dunn said.

Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) spokeswoman Joanne Ou pointed to Dunn's statement when asked by reporters, saying Taipei would continue to deepen its relations with the US, including self-defense capabilities, and promote "cross-strait peace and security."

However, some lawmakers from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) saw the US move as encouraging, saying it makes the US declaring its support for Taiwan easier.

DPP legislator Lin Chun-hsien told the [South China Morning Post](#) (SCMP) that Beijing and the US have different understandings of the One-China policy.

"The US used to turn a blind eye to the Chinese explanation of its one-China principle and, by removing those statements, it now clearly defines its one-China policy that no longer contains the part 'Taiwan is a part of China,'" Lin said.

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Long Live the King! Apple Discontinues Last iPod Model After 21-Year Run

Apple announced the end of an era on Tuesday, revealing that it would end production of the iPod Touch, the final iteration of the iPod mobile music device.

The California-based technology company made the announcement on Tuesday, explaining that the mobile devices had become obsolete as all of their functions have now become integrated into other Apple devices, like the iPhone, Apple Watch, iPad and Mac computer.

"Music has always been part of our core at Apple, and bringing it to hundreds of millions of users in the way iPod did impacted more than just the music industry — it also redefined how music is discovered, listened to, and shared," Greg Joswiak, Apple's senior vice president of Worldwide Marketing, [said in the release](#).

"Today, the spirit of iPod lives on. We've integrated an incredible music experience across all of our products, from the iPhone to the Apple Watch to HomePod mini, and across Mac, iPad, and Apple TV. And Apple Music delivers industry-leading sound quality with support for spatial audio - there's no better way to enjoy, discover, and experience music," Joswiak added.

The first iPod debuted in 2001, hitting the mobile mp3 music player market like an earthquake, bringing 5 gigabyte hard drive [the company boasted](#) would “put 1,000 songs in your pocket.” At the time, the best competitors offered storage for a few dozen songs at most. Further, the new device was compatible with existing Mac computers also built by the company. The iTunes online music store [followed two years later](#), further buttressing its dominance.

The iPod was Apple’s first foray into mobile devices while the company was still heavily dependent on sales of personal computers. By 2006, iPods represented [40% of its revenue](#). The following year, the iPhone was released, which began the slow decline of the iPod’s dominance. The final iteration, the iPod Touch, was introduced the same year, and is presently in its 7th generation.

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Paris Hilton Spotted at White House in Support of Enhanced Care for Institutionalized Youth
By - Evan Craighead

Paris Hilton visited Washington, DC, on Tuesday with husband Carter Reum, a venture capitalist who allegedly fathered a child with reality television personality Laura Bellizzi. The couple was recently featured in “Paris In Love,” a reality show that follows life after their star-studded wedding at the late Barron Hilton’s Bel-Air estate.

The 41-year-old hotel heiress met with policy staff on Tuesday in support of her backing the Federal Accountability for Congregate Care Act, a bill that seeks to form a joint commission on research to understand the scope of institutional abuse, create a ‘Youth in Congregate Care Bill of Rights’, and earmark funds to address systemic issues.

A White House official told CNN that Hilton “was at the White House with state and national advocates as part of her advocacy efforts to improve protections of youth in residential programs and facilities.”

During her meeting with policy staff, “she and other survivors shared their powerful stories and discussed issues pertinent to the protection of institutionalized youth in America.”

[The bill was first mentioned last year](#) by Reps. Ro Khanna (D-CA), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Adam Schiff (D-CA), and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR).

Later in the day, Hilton met with Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA) to discuss child abuse laws in the US.

“Met w Paris Hilton to discuss how we can stop abuse of children in residential care facilities,” [tweeted the GOP lawmaker from Iowa](#).

Hilton has opened up in recent years about the alleged abuse she endured while attending Provo Canyon School in Utah.

Following the initial revelation of her allegations in the 2020 documentary ‘[This is Paris](#),’ the hotel heiress went before the Utah state legislature to testify in favor of a bill that sought to assign more government oversight to treatment centers that deal with so-called ‘troubled’ youth. During her appearance, Hilton testified how she was “verbally, mentally, and physically abused on a daily basis” while attending the Utah school for approximately 11 months.

"Yet, while using the bathroom and while showering, staff would violate my rights. This is unconstitutional, degrading, and terrifying," Hilton testified.

"That small room covered in scratch marks and smeared blood with no bathroom is one of the most vivid and traumatizing memories I've ever experienced in my entire life."

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Alabama CO Dies of Suspected Suicide as 11-Day Manhunt for Capital Murder Suspect Ends
By - Evan Craighead

The nationwide manhunt for an escaped capital murder suspect and an Alabama corrections official-turned-perpetrator came to a close following a 15-minute police chase in Indiana on Monday. Officials confirm the corrections officer (CO) was hospitalized with a self-inflicted gunshot wound, but has since died.

Casey White, a 38-year-old inmate who escaped Lauderdale County jail on April 29, is back in police custody and appears to be fully cooperating with authorities following the botched escape that led to the death of co-conspirator Vicky White, an assistant director of corrections with the Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office.

Casey White and Vicky White have no marriage ties and are not related, according to authorities.

During a Tuesday news conference, Vanderburgh County Sheriff Dave Wedding disclosed that authorities found a cache of weapons in the getaway car operated by Casey White and Vicky White. The 38-year-old reportedly intended to stage a shootout if caught by authorities.

"He said that he was probably going to have a shootout at the stake of both of them losing their lives," Wedding said of the capital murder suspect. "Their plan was pretty faulty. They're criminals, their plan was faulty, and it failed, thank God."

The sheriff detailed that the two had approximately \$29,000 in cash, a number of wigs, an AR-15, and at least four handguns when they were captured on Monday.

While Vicky White was hospitalized with a fatal gunshot wound, Wedding said that Casey White suffered "a couple bumps and bruises" after officers rammed his getaway car into a ditch.

Authorities do not believe that Vicky White and Casey White had a "mutual" relationship.

"He was not forcing her," the sheriff said of the two.

Casey White claimed that he and his co-conspirator planned to "hide out and lay low" at an Indiana hotel, Wedding said. The two reportedly paid for a 14-day stay and "wanted to stop for a while, get their bearings straight and then figure out their next place to travel."

The 15-minute police chase reportedly began after authorities spotted a Cadillac linked to the couple parked in the hotel's lot.

Dash camera footage from the Evansville Police Department shows Casey White being handcuffed and slung onto a cruiser.

Several officers donning a variety of gear were seen around the 38-year-old's getaway car, which was flipped on its side in a nearby ditch.

"Casey quickly surrendered, and his immediate words to our team was ... 'Please help my wife. She just shot herself in the head,'" US Deputy Marshal Chad Hunt, commander of the Gulf Coast Regional Fugitive Task Force, [told WTVF](#).

Authorities do not believe Casey White shot Vicky White.

Lauderdale County Sheriff Rick Singleton said that he was concerned that Vicky White would turn to suicide if she and Casey White were caught.

"Knowing Vicky and what she'd be facing coming back—and more than facing the charges, facing her family and coworkers—I was just concerned that would really weigh on her and if it came down to a situation like it did today, this would be the result," the sheriff said on Monday, [as reported by NewsNationNow](#).

Singleton went on to highlight that authorities "got a dangerous man off the street today."

Prior to his escape late last month, Casey White was set to go on trial for the 2015 killing of 58-year-old Connie Ridgeway, who was stabbed to death in her home. The 38-year-old has admitted to the crime.

Additionally, White was sentenced in 2019 to 75 years behind bars for his role in a string of crimes committed in Limestone County, Alabama, including attempted murder, robbery, burglary, and a police chase.

Although Casey White was captured in Indiana, he will face no additional charges in the state, as he signed a waiver of extradition for his return to Alabama.

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Trump-Backed Candidates See Losses in Nebraska Primaries, Victory in West Virginia
By - Evan Craighead

The power of an endorsement from former US President Donald Trump was put to the test on Tuesday in both Nebraska and West Virginia – two states holding primaries ahead of the 2022 midterm elections on November 8, 2022. While the Trump-preferred candidate secured a 'W' in WV, Nebraska proved to be a major 'L' for those supported by 45.

Nebraska

Veterinarian Jim Pillen, a hog farmer, emerged as the victor of Nebraska's crowded Republican primary for governor. Pillen is expected to have quite the lead in support over Democratic counterpart Carol Blood, a state senator, [according to the Associated Press](#).

Nebraska has not elected a Democratic governor since 1994.

Pillen beat eight opponents, including Trump-backed businessman Charles Herbster, who was accused of groping young women. At least eight women accused Herbster of sexual misconduct occurring between 2017 and 2022, [per the Nebraska Examiner](#).

Herbster is the chief executive officer of Carico Farms, Herbster Angus Farms, and the Conklin Company.

Meanwhile, Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE), who has been outspoken about his opposition to Trump's role in the January 6 insurrection, was projected by Edison Research to be the Republican to face off against Democratic challenger Tony Vargas in a contentious November election.

“They didn’t have a right to break in and do what they did,” [Rep. Bacon in a statement](#) published on the one-year anniversary of the insurrection. “Let’s rein this back in.”

West Virginia

However, in West Virginia, [Edison Research projected](#) that Trump-back US congressional candidate Alex Mooney beat out challengers Rep. David McKinley (R-WV) and Susan Buchser-Lochocki in the Republican Primary for state’s 2nd District in the US House. McKinley was backed by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice (R-WV).

“I can tell you that I’m absolutely really close with the Trump family and I know President Trump from time to time can make a mistake and in this one—he’s made a mistake,” Justice said of Trump’s endorsement for Mooney, [as reported by WV Metro News](#).

Mooney has notably supported Trump’s unsubstantiated claims of widespread election fraud in the 2020 General Election. Meanwhile, McKinley agreed that Biden won the 2020 US presidential.

Mooney will face off against Barry Wendell, who received more than 55% of the vote and beat out opponent Angela Dwyer.

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Rapper Young Thug Arrested, Charged With Conspiracy to Violate Georgia's RICO Act
By - Mary Manley

Rapper Young Thug, whose real name is Jeffery Lamar Williams, is known for his cultural impact on the hip hop and trap music world. Young Thug co-wrote the 2018 song “This is America” with Childish Gambino, which became the 31st song to debut at number one on the US Billboard Hot 100.

Rapper Young Thug, 30, was arrested on [Monday](#) at his home in Buckhead, Atlanta, Georgia. Fulton County prosecutors charged the musician along with 27 others with conspiracy to violate the state’s Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act as well as participation in criminal street gang activities.

On [Sunday](#), prosecutors filed an 88-page indictment in Fulton Superior Court that outlines specific charges against the 28 individuals, who they allege were part of a gang called “Young Slime Life” (YSL). The members are said to have “conspired to associate and with others for the common purposes of illegally obtaining money and property through a pattern of racketeering activity and conducting and participating in the enterprise through a pattern of racketeering activity.”

The indictment lists 181 acts allegedly committed by the YSL gang members—which prosecutors say is an affiliate of the national Bloods gang—between 2012 and 2020, some of those include murder, aggravated assault, firearms violations, theft, drug possession, armed robbery, and carjacking.

The Georgia native has been listed as one of the founders of YSL, which was formed in 2012, along with Walter Murphy and Trontavious Stephen.

During a news conference on Tuesday, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis emphasized her first career goal of targeting gangs, who she says are committing 75% - 80% of all violent crime in Fulton County.

"I said just a week or two ago, it does not matter what your notoriety is or what your fame is, if you come to Fulton County, Georgia, and you commit crimes —and certainly if those crimes are in furtherance of a street gang— then you will become a target and focus of this district attorney's office and we will prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law," Willis said.

Rapper Gunna, whose real name is Sergio Giavanni Kitchens and is a Grammy-nominated artist, was also charged in the indictment, though it remains unknown if Gunna has been arrested.

Prosecutors say that YSL was operating out of southeast Atlanta as well as the Cleveland Avenue area but began expanding their activities into the surrounding metro area. Members of YSL can be identified by their green or red bandanas, clothes with the letters "YSL" or "slime," references to Cleveland Avenue as "Bleveland" and the "two guns" hand sign.

Young Thug made his first appearance in court on Tuesday morning. "Mr. Williams committed no crime whatsoever," his lawyer told local media.

International

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Avoiding Social Media for Just One Week Cuts Depression, Study Finds

By - Mary Manley

In the United Kingdom, the number of adults who use social media increased from 45% in 2011 to 71% in 2021. Roughly 97% of those aged 16 to 44 use social media as a frequent online activity and 95% of adults have used the internet within the last three months.

A group of researchers at the University of Bath conducted a [study](#) in which they found that taking a weeklong break from social media improves a person's well-being, as well as reduces depression and anxiety. The authors of the study also suggest that taking a break from social media may be recommended as a way to help people manage their mental health in the future. Scores for anxiety, depression and overall well-being —meaning satisfaction and sense of purpose— were taken before the study began. People included in the study were aged between 18 and 72 and used social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok.

The [study's](#) participants reported spending an average of eight hours a week on social media. For some participants, giving up social media for one week gave them nine hours of free time. Researchers randomly divided 154 participants aged 18 to 72 who reported using social media everyday into two groups: one in which participants were asked to stop using all social media for one week, and another in which participants could continue using social media as they normally would. The average age of the participants was 29.6.

The experimental group that was asked to stay off social media found it difficult to do so and spent an average of 21 minutes online— which is about three minutes of social media use a day. Those who were allowed to continue using social media averaged 7 hours.

“Scrolling social media is so ubiquitous that many of us do it almost without thinking from the moment we wake up to when we close our eyes at night,” said lead researcher from Bath’s Department of Health, Dr. Jeff Lambert. “Many of our participants reported positive effects from being off social media with improved mood and less anxiety overall. This suggests that even just a small break can have an impact.”

“Of course, social media is a part of life and for many people, it’s an indispensable part of who they are and how they interact with others. But if you are spending hours each week scrolling and you feel it is negatively impacting you, it could be worth cutting down on your usage to see if it helps,” added Lambert.

At the end of the study, participants who took the one-week “detox” from social media had reported significant improvements in well-being, depression, and anxiety compared to those who continued using social media.

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Webb Space Telescope’s Optical Alignment Deemed 'Perfect' by NASA After Capturing Stunning Test Pics
By - Mary Manley

The James Webb Space Telescope (Webb) was launched on Christmas Day - nearly five months ago. The \$10 billion project is a large infrared telescope that was created with the intent of becoming the leading observatory for astronomers across the globe for the next decade. The [Webb](#) telescope will have the ability to observe some of the first galaxies ever created, changing the future of astronomy, and the most powerful telescope ever launched into space has yet to disappoint.

On [April](#) 18, test images were released revealing razor-sharp images captured by Webb of a star field in the Large Magellanic Cloud. This star field was left murky in images by NASA’s now-retired Spitzer Space Telescope. However, a new image released on Monday is now offering a detailed view of the star field, capturing an image that includes defined clouds. “I’m delighted to report that the telescope alignment has been completed with performance even better than we had anticipated,” said Michael McElwain in a Monday release. McElwain is a Webb observatory project scientist at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

“We basically reached a perfect telescope alignment. There’s no adjustment to the telescope optics that would make material improvements to our science performance,” added McElwain. “These are the sharpest infrared images ever taken by a space telescope.”

With 18 hexagonal mirror segments, Webb will surpass its predecessor, the beloved [Hubble](#) Space Telescope which was launched in 1990 with the capability of capturing areas of space that would otherwise be too distant or too old for Hubble to capture.

According to Pontoppidan, the objects that Webb will be assigned to photograph will be chosen based on how Webb can best showcase its capabilities. These objects will include the early universe, the lifespan of galaxies, the lifecycle of stars and even “other worlds,” including the

first generations of stars and galaxies that were formed following the big bang 13.8 billion years ago.

"[NASA's] objective is to demonstrate... to the world and to the public that Webb is fully operational and that it produces excellent results," said Klaus [Pontoppidan](#), Webb project scientist at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. "It's also an opportunity to celebrate the beginning of many years of Webb science."

Though Webb's official images won't make their debut until later this summer, most likely in mid-July, scientists are keeping Webb's first official [object](#) a secret.

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Israel Arrests Nine Suspects After Plane Crash Photos Spam Passengers' Phones Before Takeoff

By - Mary Manley

On Tuesday, photos were mysteriously sent to Turkish Airlines passengers' phones via AirDrop, a tool created by Apple for iPhones that allows images to be shared without WiFi or cellular data. Passengers showed the terrifying images while taxiing, causing the plane's pilot to cancel takeoff.

A [Turkish](#) airliner with 160 people on board canceled takeoff at Israel's Ben Gurion Airport on Tuesday after chaos erupted moments after passengers were sent plane crash photos to their iPhones via AirDrop.

According to a police spokesperson, the images included a 2009 crash of a Turkish plane in the Netherlands and a 2013 accident in San Francisco, California, as well as footage from inside the plane.

The photos caused mass panic on the AnadoluJet 737. According to one of the [passengers](#), a woman fainted and another had a panic attack.

Nine suspects who police say are all Israeli citizens were dragged off the plane by security and could be charged for disseminating false information, an offense which carries a maximum of three years in prison in Israel.

The flight was destined for Istanbul from Tel Aviv and took off after re-inspection several hours after the delayed takeoff.

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Biden Delays COVID Funding Bill to Fast-Track Ukraine 'Aid'

By - Ian DeMartino

Since the start of Russia's special operation in Ukraine, the United States government has been steadfast in providing nearly unlimited funding to Ukraine. But as the COVID-19 pandemic

continues to wreak havoc on the lives of Americans, US President Joe Biden is showing what he prioritizes.

In a [statement](#) posted to the White House website on Monday, US President Joe Biden announced that he is decoupling the COVID-19 relief package in order to rush military aid to Ukraine.

"Previously, I had recommended that Congress take overdue action on much needed funding for COVID treatments, vaccines and tests, as part of the Ukraine Supplemental bill. However, I have been informed by congressional leaders in both parties that such an addition would slow down action on the urgently needed Ukrainian aid – a view expressed strongly by several Congressional Republicans," the statement reads.

"We cannot afford delay in this vital war effort. Hence, I am prepared to accept that these two measures move separately, so that the Ukrainian aid bill can get to my desk right away."

While Biden says that helping Americans "combat COVID" is of equal importance, the decoupling of the two efforts shows which is a priority for the White House.

Since Russia's special operation in Ukraine began, the United States has been sending billions, seemingly without restraint. In March, Congress authorized \$13.6 billion, a fund Biden says will be exhausted in the next ten days. It has been estimated that the United States [is spending](#) \$100 million a day in Ukraine.

The new Ukraine funding bill will far exceed the last one: the House of Representatives is [expected to approve](#) a \$39.8 billion bill to provide additional aid. By contrast, the last COVID relief bill included \$10 billion in funding that came from previous COVID-19 relief fund programs [that went unspent](#).

In the statement, President Biden says the COVID relief funds are needed to provide testing, vaccines, including next-generation vaccines, and new COVID treatments, presumably antiviral pills.

The conclusion of the statement lays out the president's priorities in plain sight: "I call on Congress to pass the Ukrainian Supplemental funding bill immediately, and get it to my desk in the next few days. And then, I urge Congress to move promptly on the COVID funding bill." The statement concludes, "This virus knows no borders; we must continue to save lives here at home and around the world."

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14.2 Million Could Lose Medicaid Coverage When Public Health Emergency Ends

By - Ian DeMartino

Medicaid is a federal and state program that helps provide health insurance to those unable to afford it or with disabilities. An estimated 86.9 million individuals are on Medicaid in the United States as of April 2022.

Up to 14.2 Million people will be kicked off Medicaid when the Public Health Emergency (PHE) order ends.

In 2020, the coronavirus relief bill gave states additional Medicaid funding in exchange for not kicking anyone off of the program, even if they were no longer eligible. Due largely to this, called the continuous enrollment requirement, Medicaid enrollment has increased 25% since 2019.

[According to an analysis](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), when the PHE ends, 5.3 to 14.2 million people could lose Medicaid coverage.

The PHE has been renewed by the federal government every 90 days since it was first implemented. Officials have indicated that states will be given 60 days warning before letting the PHE expire. It is currently set to expire on July 15, if an announcement does not come from the White House by the middle of May. It is a safe bet that it will be extended at least another 90 days.

After the expiration of the PHE, many Medicaid recipients will be kicked off the rolls because they will no longer be eligible, but others could be removed due to procedural reasons. For example, a recipient will lose their benefits if the state needs updated information after the PHE expires but does not receive it in time. Others could see their Medicaid end because they would become eligible for subsidies under the Affordable Care Act Expansion but are unaware of that fact.

According to the study, 42% of the 22.2 million new enrollees are children.

During the pandemic, the federal government sent \$100.4 billion in Medicaid funding to the states. That was higher than the increased costs the states suffered due to the increased Medicaid enrollment, though the amount differs from state to state.

Further complicating the matter is that different states will have different procedures on how they inform people they are being kicked off of Medicaid or that the state needs updated information. According to a [previous KFF survey](#), 15 states plan to use electronic data to identify and target enrollees who may no longer be eligible after the continuous enrollment requirement is lifted and 39 states plan to use a full year to process redeterminations, but nine other states plan to return to normal operations quicker than that.

Some states are still determining what their plan will be, according to the survey.

The loss in Medicaid coverage will likely play a role in when President Biden decides to end the PHE. While the pandemic is still raging, the United States is currently averaging 367 new deaths a day according to the New York Times, much of the country is operating as normal. If the PHE is extended another 90 days after July 15, the next deadline will be October 13. Another 90-day extension after that would delay it until January 11, 2023.

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Tom Brady is Joining the FOX Broadcast Booth, Eventually
By - Ian DeMartino

Tom Brady started his playing career after being drafted by the New England Patriots with the 199th overall pick in the 2000 NFL Draft. He has won seven Super Bowls, three league MVPs and is the career NFL leader with 84,520 passing yards and 624 touchdowns.

During an investors call, FOX CEO Lachlan Murdoch announced that the Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback will be joining lead play-by-play man Kevin Burkhardt to provide color commentary during games.

The partnership will begin next year, or maybe the year after that, or whenever the 44-year-old finally decides to hang up his cleats. At the end of last season, Brady briefly retired after losing to the Los Angeles Rams in the Divisional Round of the playoffs, but then changed his mind and announced his return two months later.

Tom Brady has been an ageless wonder in the NFL. Despite his advanced age, Brady led the league in both passing yards (5,316) and passing touchdowns (43). He also led the Buccaneers to the NFC South Divisional title and is only one season removed from his 2020 SuperBowl win in his first season with the Buccaneers.

Tom Brady is also only the second quarterback to win Super Bowls with two different teams. The other is his longtime rival, Peyton Manning. In addition to one Super Bowl with the Buccaneers, Tom Brady won six Super Bowls with the New England Patriots.

Brady will be the latest in a string of former quarterbacks making the jump to media. Tony Romo, who spent 14 years under center with the Dallas Cowboys, has received critical acclaim for his work in the CBS broadcast booth after retiring in 2017. Drew Brees signed on as an analyst for NBC after a two-decade career and brothers Peyton Manning and Eli Manning started providing alternative commentary on ESPN2 for Monday Night Football games last year.

Murdoch said Brady will also work as an ambassador with a focus on “client and promotional initiatives,” but did not specify exactly what that will entail.

Brady tweeted that he is “excited” but that there is still “a lot of unfinished business on the field” with the Buccaneers.

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Study: 50-50 Chance Earth Will Exceed 1.5-Degree Warming Milestone in Next 5 Years
By - Ian DeMartino

In 2015, the European Union and 192 nation states agreed to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, pledging to curb greenhouse emissions in an attempt to limit the heating of Earth to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

It is as likely [as not](#) that Earth will have at least one year in the next five that breach the Paris Climate Agreement’s threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) increase in global temperatures, which if maintained, would result in more ecological destruction to the planet through climate change.

A recent study by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has indicated there is a 93% chance that at least one year in the next five will exceed 2016 as the warmest year on record, as well as a 93% chance that the next five years will be warmer than the last five.

Breaching the limit set during the Paris Climate Agreement would not mean that the world failed its goals, at least not yet. It will not be a permanent increase, only a temporary spike where the annual mean is higher than normal, but it is concerning nonetheless.

The worst effects of climate change [will not be felt](#) until the planet maintains an increased temperature rise consistently. When that happens, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts we will see crop failures, rising sea levels, drought and increased environmental disasters like hurricanes, wildfires, the destruction of coral reefs and extreme heat waves.

Already, the IPCC says that human emissions have contributed to an increase of 1.07 degrees Celsius (1.9 Fahrenheit) in the planet's warming when compared to pre-industrial levels.

However, many countries are falling behind targets agreed to within the Paris Agreement. A September study by Climate Action Tracker found that of the 36 countries plus the European Union, only the Republic of The Gambia has made commitments that will keep them on pace with the Paris agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The Gambia is the smallest country in mainland Africa.

US President Joe Biden's Build Back Better agenda had significant funding for action on climate change, but after failing to pass in 2021, it has seemingly fallen off the table as a priority for both the White House and Congress.

Already we are seeing the effects of climate change, with droughts in East Africa and the US Southwest, and record breaking heat waves in India and Pakistan. Last week, temperatures reached as high as 47 degrees Celsius (116.6 degrees Fahrenheit) in Pakistan.

A worst case scenario prediction by the IPCC says temperatures could increase by 4.5 degrees Celsius (8.1 degrees Fahrenheit) by 2100, creating apocalyptic conditions where human society would struggle to survive.

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Biden Admin. to Double Funding for Domestic Fertilizer Production to \$500Mln - White House
WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration said on Wednesday it is doubling funding for fertilizer production inside the country in an effort to address rising costs brought on by sanctions against Russia, the world's largest fertilizer exporter.

"Today, President [Joe] Biden is announcing that he is doubling his initial \$250 million investment in domestic fertilizer production to \$500 million to lower costs and boost availability for farmers, so they can obtain the inputs they need at prices they can afford to maximize yields," the White House said in a statement.

Fertilizer prices have more than doubled since last year, due in part to supply chain issues, the Ukraine conflict and rising energy costs, it added.

The administration also plans to support efforts to increase cropping in the US.

"The Biden-Harris Administration is seeking to expand insurance for double cropping to as many as 681 additional counties," the statement noted.

The White House has blamed Russia for the current inflation, saying that the situation in Ukraine has cut off a critical source of wheat, corn, barley, oilseeds, and cooking oil, as well as disrupted global supply chains for fertilizer, which farmers depend on to maximize yields.

"These and other actions, combined with the ongoing pandemic-related disruptions to global supply chains, have put pressure on food prices, with global food prices increasing nearly 13 percent following Putin's invasion," the statement read.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Russia and Ukraine were among the top global exporters of various types of staple foods, including wheat and corn in 2021. Russia is also a top fertilizer exporter. Ukraine's food production is now being threatened by factors such as disruption of logistics, loss of access to agricultural lands, labor shortages, damage to crops due to hostilities, and destruction of food system assets and infrastructure.

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US Consumer Prices Up 8.3% in Year to April, Slight Drop From March - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US consumer prices rose 8.3% in the year to April, easing slightly from March while keeping inflation in the world's largest economy not far from the four-decade highs seen in recent months, the Labor Department said Wednesday.

"In April, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers rose 0.3 percent, seasonally adjusted, and rose 8.3 percent over the last 12 months, not seasonally adjusted," the department said, referring to its reading for the so-called CPI.

In its reading for last month, the Labor Department said the CPI rose 8.5% in the year to March, growing at its fastest pace since the 1980s. Economists had forecast an 8.1% growth for the 12 months to April, putting the reported number still above expectations.

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Biden Discusses Ukraine, China With Italian Counterpart - White House

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden discussed matters on Ukraine, China and Libya with his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi during a meeting, a joint readout from the White House said.

"They underscored their continued commitment to pursuing peace by supporting Ukraine and imposing costs on Russia," the release said on Tuesday.

Biden and Draghi also discussed measures about fostering food security and reshaping global energy markets, the release said.

The two leaders also discussed continuing cooperation on shared foreign policy challenges, including those pertaining to China and Libya, according to the release. Biden and Draghi will continue their discussions at the G7 Summit and NATO Summit in June, the release added.

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US House Panel Chair Says More Sanctions Coming Against Russia in Coordination With Allies

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Gregory Meeks said more sanctions against Russia will soon be implemented in coordination with United States' allies.

"There'll be more sanctions coming," Meeks said on Tuesday following a meeting with President Joe Biden on the issue of Ukraine. "We are going to tighten it and work it together in a multilateral way with our allies."

Meeks also said the US government needs to look for ways to make sure that designated Russian nationals cannot go to other countries on a tourist visa or other visas to avoid the sanctions that are being placed on them.

In addition, Meeks said Congress will make sure there is very little to no exports to Russia from other countries or little to no imports of any Russian products.

The Foreign Affairs Committee chairman emphasized that Congress wants to ensure there is no way to evade the comprehensive sanctions imposed on Russia.

The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on a nearly \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine later on Tuesday night.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian government said the goal of the operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and it is solely targeting military infrastructure.

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US Gas Prices Seen Returning to 14-Year Highs as Supply Lags Demand - Energy Agency

NEW YORK, May 11 (Sputnik) - US natural gas prices are expected to trade at around 14-year highs of above \$8 in the coming months as storage levels for the fuel persistently stay below key five-year averages, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its latest monthly forecast.

The front-month natural gas contract on the New York Mercantile Exchange's Henry Hub settled at \$7.385 per million metric British thermal units (mmBtu) on Tuesday, and the EIA forecast an average price \$8.59 per mmBtu for the fuel during the second half of the year. Henry Hub gas hit 2008 highs of \$8.989 per mmBtu last week.

"We expect the Henry Hub price to average \$7.83/MMBtu in 2Q22 and average \$8.59/MMBtu in 2H22," the agency said in its monthly Short-Term Energy Outlook. "High forecast natural gas

prices reflect our expectation that natural gas storage levels will remain less than the five-year (2017–2021) average this summer."

Natural gas in storage is currently at around 1.5 trillion cubic feet, or about 20% below the five-year average.

The EIA said the lower-than-average storage was partly due to limited opportunities for natural gas-to-coal switching for power generation - as coal prices have also been relatively high amid strained supplies and continued environmental resistance toward the latter.

The limited use of coal in the United States will likely keep gas demand for power generation high, despite its prices, the EIA said.

"Natural gas prices could rise significantly above forecast levels if summer temperatures are hotter than assumed in this forecast and electricity demand is higher," it said. "In addition, we expect that US liquefied natural gas exports (LNG) will remain high during the summer."

However, beyond this year, natural gas prices could halve, with the EIA forecasting a Henry Hub average of just \$4.74 in 2023.

"The forecast drop in prices for 2023 reflects our expectation that the rate of natural gas production will increase next year while LNG export and demand growth slow, contributing to higher storage levels in 2023 than in 2022," the EIA added.

Exports of LNG, or liquefied natural gas, are expected to climb to an average of 12 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) for all of this year, up 23% from 2021, largely due to European demand for US LNG after the sanctions imposed on Russian gas.

But demand for US LNG is only expected to grow by only 5% in 2023 due to constraints in capacity expansion, thus limiting the rally in gas prices, the EIA said.

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US Works With Partners on Alternative Ways to Export Grain, Corn From Ukraine - Diplomat

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is working with its partners to establish alternative routes for export of grain and corn from Ukraine, President Joe Biden's nominee for US ambassador in Kiev Bridget Brink said during her confirmation hearing.

"We are trying to work with international partners and others to help finding alternative routes for grain and corn out of Ukraine," Brink told the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday. Brink accused Russia of blocking the Ukraine ports in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, characterizing Moscow's moves as a "big challenge."

Brink also noted that the US government is coordinating efforts with relief organizations to help countries that have a dependence on these exports.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian government said the goal of the operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and it is solely targeting military infrastructure.

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Biden's Ukraine Ambassador Nominee Says Does Not Know When US Embassy Will Return to Kiev

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden's candidate for US Ambassador to Ukraine, Bridget Brink, during her confirmation hearing said she does not know when the US embassy will return to Kiev.

Last week, US Charge d'Affaires Kristina Kvien said the Biden administration hopes conditions will permit the embassy, temporarily shut down and moved to Lviv in mid-February, to return to Kiev by end of May.

"I do not know exactly how fast we will be able to do this process, but I know we are trying to do it as fast as possible," Brink said during a hearing at the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken informed Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in a Sunday phone call of a recent visit to Kiev by US diplomats ahead of the US embassy reopening, according to the State Department.

Brink expressed the hope to start her work, if confirmed, in the Ukrainian capital and noted that Kvien is laying the groundwork to return the embassy.

"We will have to look at the security situation, but I have a great confidence in our security experts, including those on the ground, to give us advice that allows us to continue to advance our strategic interests, which means being present to work with the Ukrainians, work with other embassies, and also coordinate back with Washington from Kiev," she said.

On February 24, Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk appealed for help in defending themselves against Ukrainian forces. Many countries began evacuating or relocating their embassies to the western parts of Ukraine even before the Russian advance.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, May 11 (Sputnik) -

UKRAINE DEVELOPMENTS

* Russia used between ten and 12 hypersonic weapons in Ukraine since the beginning of its special military operation there, a senior US Defense Department official said on Tuesday.

* Ukrainian forces lost 14 aircraft and helicopters, 30 drones and 50 people during an attempted capture of Snake Island in the past several days, Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said.

- * The reckless attack on Snake Island was suggested to Volodymyr Zelenskyy by his British military advisers for Public Relations purposes and he personally ordered to proceed with the plan despite objections from the Ukrainian General Staff, a Russian military source said.
- * The United States has no indication that Russia has used hypersonic weapons in Odessa, a US Defense Department official told reporters.
- * The United Nations has credible information about Ukrainian troops torturing Russian prisoners, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine head Matilda Bogner said.

ENERGY MARKETS

- * The Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine announced on Tuesday the termination of the Russian gas transit to Europe through the Sokhranivka station which is located in the Luhansk region from May 11.
- * Germany decided to permanently cut its dependence on Russian energy resources to "zero", German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said.
- * Global crude oil benchmark Brent could dip to as low as \$97 a barrel by next year, from Tuesday's trade of above \$100, though the dynamics around Russia's sanctioned supply makes that outlook uncertain, the US Energy Administration (EIA) said.
- * Gazprom has been informed by the Ukrainian operator about the termination of gas transit through the Sokhranivka entry point starting Wednesday over an alleged force majeure, but has no information that would confirm the necessity of such a measure, Gazprom spokesman Sergey Kupriyanov said.

MACRON-XI TALKS

- * French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed by telephone the situation in Ukraine and the risks of a global food crisis caused by the conflict, the Elysee Palace said on Tuesday.
- * The two leaders issued a statement pledging support all efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Ukraine.

SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

- * Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov referred on Tuesday to the proposal voiced by EU chief diplomat Josep Borrell to hand over frozen Russian assets to Ukraine as "theft."
- * Sanctions against Russia cannot be lifted until the conflict in Ukraine is over even if they have a negative effect on Germany and its economy, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said.

CONFERENCE ON SYRIA IN BRUSSELS

- * Russia remains one of the key players in the Syria peace settlement, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday, referring to the European Union's decision not to invite Moscow to the conference on Syria in Brussels.
- * The United States has pledged to provide more than \$800 million in new humanitarian aid to the Syrian people, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced in Brussels.

* The European Union has pledged to increase humanitarian assistance to Syrians up to 1.5 billion euros (\$1.58 billion) for 2022 and to allocate an equal amount following year, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said.

SHANGHAI LOCKDOWNS

* The full impact of China's latest coronavirus lockdowns has yet to be factored into the global economy but will exacerbate supply-chain and inflation pressure across the world, Fitch Ratings said in an outlook published on Tuesday.

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US Stocks Snap 3-Day Selloff But Investors Remain Wary of Recession

NEW YORK, May 10 (Sputnik) - US stocks mostly closed higher on Tuesday, snapping a three-day selloff, but analysts warned that the rebound was fragile as investors remain fearful of the potential for a recession amid record fuel prices and Federal Reserve statements it may aggressively hike interest rates to beat back inflation.

The Nasdaq Composite Index - one of the three major US stock indices which groups top technology names such as Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google - led Tuesday's action, rising almost 1% to close at 11,738. Prior to that, the Nasdaq had lost 10% over three days of continuous selling that drove it to its lowest levels since November 2020.

Nasdaq aside, the S&P 500 Index for the top 500 US stocks closed up 0.3%, after a 7%-drop in three days prior.

The broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average Index bucked the positive trend, settling down 0.3% and extending its previous three-day decline of about 5%.

Tuesday's measured rebound in stocks came as the American Automobile Association reported the average price of gasoline at the pump at a record high of \$4.37 a gallon.

Meanwhile, Federal Reserve officials were debating the possibility of a 75-basis point (bps) interest rate hike when they meet in June, after instituting increases of 50-bps and 25 bps at their May and March meetings, respectively. Those will be the highest US rate hikes in at least a generation as the central bank tries to beat back price increases.

"There's clearly a huge amount of worry about a recession in the markets at the minute as central banks continue to aggressively tighten against the backdrop of a slowing economy and a cost-of-living crisis," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "There's a lot of pressure on household budgets and it's only going to intensify as the year progresses which will take its toll."

After contracting 3.5% in 2020 from disruptions forced by the coronavirus pandemic, the US economy expanded by 5.7% in 2021, growing at its quickest pace since 1982.

However, inflation has grown even faster. The Personal Consumption Expenditure Index, a US inflation indicator closely followed by the Federal Reserve, rose by 5.8% in the year to December and 6.6% in the 12 months to March. Both readings also indicated the fastest growth since the 1980s.

The Consumer Price Index, another key measure for inflation, meanwhile, rose 8.5% in the year to March. The Federal Reserve's own tolerance for inflation is 2% per year. Notwithstanding Tuesday's rebound, stocks are still nursing heavy losses on the year, with the Nasdaq down 25% and the S&P500 and Dow off by 16% and 12%, respectively.

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US Marines Test New APG-79(V)4 Radar System on F/A-18 Hornet Jet - Raytheon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The pre-production APG-79(V)4 radar system had a successful test flight on a US Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornet at the Naval Air Weapons Station in China Lake, California, Raytheon Intelligence and Space (RI&S) said in a press release on Tuesday.

"RI&S's pre-production APG-79(V)4 radar system was successfully flown on a Marine Corps F/A-18 Hornet earlier this year," the release said. "This is the radar system's first flight on the aircraft since RI&S delivered the prototype radar in 2021."

Raytheon said the APG-79(V)4 is an APG-79 radar derivative that employs the first airborne GaN-AESA fire-control radar to help pilots detect and track enemy aircraft from greater distances with greater accuracy and meets the power and cooling requirements of legacy aircraft.

"Following successful ground testing and the delivery of the prototype radar, this flight test was critical to observe performance in the air," RI&S Vice President for F/A-18 and Global Strike Radars Thomas Shaurette said in the release. "It allowed our partners to see the V4 radar's enhanced detection and tracking abilities in real-time."

The Naval Air Systems Command recently awarded additional contract modifications to equip the Hornet fleet with more radars in 2021, and the total production value for domestic and foreign military sales customers is over \$300 million, the release said.

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Lockheed Martin Delivers Non-Line of Sight Missile System to US Special Operations Command

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Lockheed Martin has successfully delivered the Spike Non-Line-of-Sight (NLOS) missile system on the Oshkosh's Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) to US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the company said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Lockheed Martin successfully delivered the NLOS missile system on the Oshkosh JLTV to USSOCOM," the release said. "This integration demonstrates the versatility of the Spike NLOS weapon system."

The combination of Spike NLOS's long-range and precision-strike capabilities with the JLTV's superior agility will result in next-level mobility and mission effectiveness for our operators, the release said.

The advanced weapon system's real-time video imagery allows operators to alter or abort missions while en route to a target, providing users with more options in critical moments, the release added.

The Spike NLOS is a multi-purpose, electro-optical/infrared missile system with an advanced rocket motor providing capability to reach ranges up to 32 kilometers (19 miles), according to the release.

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Biden's Lend-Lease Act to Require Bilateral Agreements Between Kiev, Washington - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Lend-Lease Act signed by US President Joe Biden will require a number of bilateral agreements between Kiev and Washington about compensation for or returning of the items provided to Ukraine, Defense Department spokesperson John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"It's going to require some bilateral agreements between the United States and Ukraine. That's what Lend-Lease is about. And when, through Lend-Lease, when an item is given to a country, they're responsible for either returning it and maintaining it and returning it and or providing compensation for it, should it not be able to be returned," Kirby said during a press briefing. Kirby also said that the Defense Department is still analyzing the Lend-Lease Act regarding which authorities and capabilities will best help it to provide military assistance to Ukraine.

On Monday, Biden signed into law legislation allowing lend-lease deals for military equipment to Ukraine and other Eastern European countries in order to enhance weapons transfers amid Russia military's special operation.

The lend-lease deals are reminiscent of the now famous World War II policy of US President Franklin Roosevelt that supplied Allied nations, including the Soviet Union, with weapons and resources. The move was considered an effective end of US neutrality in the war and a step toward open support for the Allies.

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US Oil Ends Below \$100 Per Barrel as Fears of Recession Mount

NEW YORK, May 10 (Sputnik) - US oil prices settled below the key \$100 per barrel support on Tuesday as recession fears have mounted among Americans amid record high gasoline prices and interest rate hikes planned by the Federal Reserve to curb inflation growing at the fastest pace in 40 years.

New York-traded West Texas Intermediate, or WTI, the benchmark for US crude, settled Tuesday's trade down \$3.33, or 3.2%, at \$99.76. WTI hit a session low of \$98.91 earlier, marking a two-week bottom since its April 26 low of \$97.06.

The US crude benchmark had gained almost 8% in two previous weeks, only to give back almost 10% within the first two days of this week's trading.

Brent crude, the London-traded global benchmark for oil, settled down \$3.48, or 3.3%, at \$102.46 a barrel, after an intraday bottom at \$101.73.

After a 6% rally in two previous weeks on speculation that Europe was converging on a much-awaited ban on Russian oil, Brent conceded 9% week-to-date on growing worries that the United States might fall into a recession.

Tuesday's slump in crude prices came as the American Automobile Association reported the average price of gasoline across US pumps at a record high of \$4.37 a gallon.

Meanwhile, Federal Reserve officials have been debating the possibility of a 75-basis point (bps) interest rate hike when they meet in June, after instituting increases of 20 bps and 50 bps at their March and May meetings, respectively. Those will be the highest US interest rate hikes in at least a generation.

"There's clearly a huge amount of worry about a recession in the markets at the minute as central banks continue to aggressively tighten against the backdrop of a slowing economy and a cost-of-living crisis," Craig Erlam, analyst at online trading platform OANDA, said. "There's a lot of pressure on household budgets and it's only going to intensify as the year progresses which will take its toll."

Even so, the unwillingness of the global oil exports alliance OPEC+ to increase production is keeping oil prices "very elevated but at a little over \$100, Erlam said, adding that it was "perhaps a sign that we should get used to these higher prices."

Gasoline prices dipped to as low as \$4.07 in April s \$4.07 a gallon in April after the Biden administration announced the release of unprecedented volumes of crude oil from the US Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) in a bid to reduce the global supply strain heightened by the sanctions on Russia.

President Joe Biden authorized his first major SPR withdrawal in November as oil supplies began tightening amid recovery in demand from the coronavirus crisis that pushed up both crude and US fuel prices.

Over the past two months, the Biden administration has taken 3 million barrels on the average out of the SPR every week to help meet domestic refiners' demand for crude in a market seeing a surfeit in fuel consumption amid strong economic recovery from the two-year long coronavirus pandemic.

The administration's biggest SPR releases commence from this month as it releases a total of 180 million barrels through July - roughly one million barrels per day over the next 180 days.

The US Weekly Petroleum Status Report showed that SPR inventories stood at 550 million barrels during the week ended April 29. That was the lowest level of stockpiles in the reserve since December 2001.

While WTI crude itself has dropped from 14-year highs of \$130 to Tuesday's lows of under \$100, gasoline prices have stubbornly above the \$4 average, prompting Biden to accuse energy companies of price-gouging.

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USS Port Royal Transits Taiwan Strait to Show Commitment to Free Indo-Pacific – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – Guided missile cruiser USS Port Royal transited the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday to demonstrate the US commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

"This was another routine transit conducted today on the 10th [of May] through international waters in accordance with international law. The ship transited through a corridor in the [Taiwan] strait that is beyond the territorial sea of any coastal state. Which is the way we do this. And Port Royal's transit demonstrates our commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Kirby told a press briefing.

Port Royal's transit came two days after Chinese military completed drills east and south-west of Taiwan. The exercises were held on May 6-8 both at sea and in air. The objective of the exercise was to increase the combat capability of various branches of the Chinese armed forces in joint operations, according to Chinese military officials.

Taiwan became alienated from Beijing after becoming a stronghold of the Chinese Nationalist Party (the Kuomintang) that suffered defeat to the Communist Party in a civil war in 1949. The Chinese mainland and the island resumed business and informal contacts in the late 1980s. Beijing opposes any official contacts of foreign countries with Taiwan and considers Chinese sovereignty over the island indisputable.

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White House Says Possible Reversal of Trump Twitter Ban Private Decision for Musk to Make

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - A possible decision by Elon Musk to reverse the ban placed on former US President Donald Trump on the social media platform Twitter is a private decision that does not change the Biden administration's goals to protect free speech and combat disinformation, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"It's the decision by a private sector company to make on who will or will not be allowed on their platforms. What I will say, broadly speaking, is that our effort is to, of course, make sure that freedom of speech is protected across the country, but that also these platforms are not used for forums for disinformation," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked for a reaction to Musk's statement to un-ban Trump from Twitter.

Earlier on Tuesday, Musk said Twitter's decision to ban Trump was a mistake and he would reverse it his acquisition of the company is successful.

Twitter recently agreed to be acquired by Musk in a deal worth \$44 billion, although it is still subject to shareholder approval.

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US-Led Contact Group on Ukraine Will Likely Meet Virtually in May – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – The US-led contact group on Ukraine is likely to meet in May by video, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"[UK] Minister [of Defense Ben] Wallace was at the Ramstein contact group. Now we're calling it the Contact Group, that consultative meeting back in Germany. There will be another one this month, most likely a virtual meeting. The [US] Secretary [of Defense Lloyd Austin] wants to do this monthly. So, the one in May will most likely be virtual," Kirby told a press briefing.

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UK Defense Chief Wallace to Meet With Austin on Visit to US on Wednesday – Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace will meet with his US counterpart, Lloyd Austin, on Wednesday during his trip to Washington, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said on Tuesday.

"We look forward to having Mr. Wallace back at the Pentagon. I think this will be the second meeting in the Pentagon with Secretary Austin. Of course, he's no stranger to the Pentagon. He was here in the previous administration as well," Kirby said during a press briefing. "The Secretary is very much looking forward to the conversation."

Ukraine is going to be a major topic of discussion between the two defense chiefs, including efforts to support the country amid its ongoing conflict with Russia, Kirby added.

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White House Says More Constructive for US to Support Kiev, Not Engage With Putin Directly

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration believes it is more constructive to continue to support Ukraine, especially militarily, instead of trying to engage with Russian President Vladimir Putin directly, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"I would say our role right now - we feel the most constructive role - is continuing to support Ukrainians' hands at the negotiating table and support them militarily," Psaki told a press briefing when asked if Joe Biden would try to engage with Putin to try to resolve the Ukraine conflict.

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Ukraine Crisis Will Be Resolved Diplomatically But US Sees No Russian Interest - Psaki

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States believes that the situation between Ukraine and Russia will be resolved diplomatically but currently sees no Russian interest in peace talks, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We certainly believe that this will be resolved through a diplomatic process and a diplomatic solution... We don't see a sign from the Russians that they are open to or eager to engage in those discussions," Psaki said during a press briefing when asked whether the US believes peace talks with a ceasefire in place could be productive.

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US Firearm Homicides Hit Quarter-Century High in 2020 - CDC

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US gun homicides reached a quarter-century high in 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a new report issued on Tuesday.

"The firearm homicide rate in 2020 was the highest recorded in over 25 years and the firearm suicide rate remained high," the report said. "Firearm deaths continue to be a significant and growing public health problem in the United States."

In 2020, 79% of all homicides and 53% of all suicides involved firearms and from 2019 to 2020, the firearm homicide rate increased about 35%, and the firearm suicide rate stayed high, the CDC said.

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the substantial increase in the firearm homicide rate, along with a notable rise in firearm suicide rates for some groups, has widened racial, ethnic, and other disparities. Young people, males, and black people have the highest firearm homicide rates and experienced the largest increases in 2020, the report said.

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Shanghai Lockdowns to Intensify Global Inflation Impact - Fitch Ratings

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The full impact of China's latest coronavirus lockdowns has yet to be factored into the global economy but will exacerbate supply-chain and inflation pressure across the world, Fitch Ratings said in an outlook published on Tuesday.

"The lockdown in Shanghai will exacerbate global supply-chain pressures and inflation concerns," the ratings agency said in its so-called Economics Dashboard outlook. "Much of this

disruption, however, is yet to be reflected in hard global macro data, although China's overall exports slowed sharply in April."

Fitch Ratings noted that restrictions imposed as part of China's zero-COVID-19 policy had led to a plunge in Shanghai freight traffic volume in April and early May.

With Shanghai handling around a fifth of China's port volume and China accounting for 15% of world merchandise exports, shortages of manufactured goods could intensify and add to the existing global inflationary pressures, the ratings agency said.

"With fewer trucks operating and Shanghai's port staff unable to load and unload ships at their usual pace, significant backlogs have built up at the Port of Shanghai," it said. "As supply-chain disruptions persist, container freight rates could remain elevated or increase. This channel is likely to outweigh the effect of slower growth in China on global inflation through a weakening of commodity demand and prices."

The Shanghai lockdown has come at a time when there were few signs of improvement in global goods shortages, including reported rising lead times for semiconductor deliveries. The time taken to transport freight from Asia to the West coast of the United States was twice as long as it was at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, while shipping rates are six times higher than they were in early 2020, Fitch Ratings said.

Ratings said the container backlog at the Shanghai port eventually will make its way to West coast ports, likely causing congestion in the summer months, Fitch Ratings also said.

"Congestion at US West Coast ports has eased in recent months, [but] this could prove temporary," Fitch Ratings added.

With US ports struggling with staffing shortages and constraints on distribution channels, supply-chain disruptions were unlikely to be resolved rapidly, according to Fitch Ratings.

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US Not in Position to Reopen Embassy in Kabul - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is not in a position to reopen the American embassy in Kabul, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"I am not aware of any discussion right. Now about reopening the Embassy in Kabul," Price said during a press briefing. "We are not in a position to reopen the embassy."

Safety and security concerns are some of the factors that have prevented the United States from having a diplomatic presence in Kabul, Price said.

The United States will judge the Taliban (outlawed in Russia) and any future relationship it may have with the group based on their conduct and willingness to live up to their commitments made to the world when it came into power in Afghanistan, Price said.

The Taliban must protect human rights of the Afghan people, including rights of Afghan women, girls, and minorities, and living up to its counterterrorism commitments, Price said.

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Nuland Heading to Morocco for Meeting of Global Coalition to Defeat IS - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Under Secretary Victoria Nuland is flying to Morocco for a meeting of ministers of the US-led coalition to defeat the Islamic State terrorist group (IS, banned in Russia), the State Department announced on Tuesday.

"Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland will travel May 10-12 to Marrakech, Morocco, to attend a meeting of the Ministers of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS," the press release said.

On behalf of Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Nuland will join Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita in co-hosting the meeting on Wednesday to discuss ongoing efforts in the campaign to achieve the enduring defeat of the IS, the State Department said.

"The under secretary and ministers will discuss ways to sustain pressure on ISIS remnants globally. Ministerial priorities will include preventing a resurgence in Iraq and Syria by stabilizing liberated areas and pursuing sustainable solutions for ISIS detainees and their family members," it added.

The coalition members will also assess priorities related to stabilization, foreign terrorist fighters, counter-IS financing, and counter-messaging efforts.

Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Yael Lempert will accompany Nuland on the trip.

From May 12-14, Lempert will also visit Tunisia to call for economic and political reform policies in the country, the State Department said.

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US Littoral Combat Ships Experiencing Structural Defects Causing Hull Cracks - Reports

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Nearly half of the US Navy's littoral combat ship Independence-class fleet is dealing with structural defects that are leading to hull cracks on the vessels, The Navy Times reported on Tuesday.

Six of the 13-ship Independence class fleet have hull cracks, which has limited the speed the vessels can operate at, the report said citing internal documents and sea service officials.

The report said the Navy has been dealing with these issues for more than two years.

The Navy did not disclose which specific ships have hull cracks but officials said they do not pose a threat to sailors or the ship's seaworthiness, the report said.

The cracks on the hull can be caused or made worse if the ship goes faster than 17 miles per hour against waves that are eight feet tall, according to the report.

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Pentagon Claims Russia Behind Its Schedule in Ukraine by Over 2 Weeks

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russia is two weeks or more behind its alleged schedule for the ongoing special military operation in Ukraine, a senior US defense official said on Tuesday. "He [Russian President Vladimir Putin] has not achieved any of the success that we believe he wanted to achieve. Certainly not on the timeline. I mean, now we would assess that he is easily two weeks or even maybe more behind where we thought or where he thought he wanted to be in the Donbas and in the south [of Ukraine]," the official said during a press briefing.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Ministry of Defense said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

Russia started the second phase of its special operation on April 19 almost entirely focusing on the Donbas region. The goals of the second phase include establishing full control over the region and southern Ukraine, according the Russian Maj. Gen. Rustam Minnekaev.

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Elon Musk Says Twitter Ban on Donald Trump 'Mistake'

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Twitter made a mistake to have banned former President Donald Trump from its social media platform because it alienated much of the United States, SpaceX founder and Tesla CEO Elon Musk said on Tuesday.

"I do think that it was not correct to ban Donald Trump, I think that was a mistake because it it alienated a large part of the country and did not ultimately result in Donald Trump not having a voice, he is now going to be on Truth Social, as will a large part of the sort of the right in the United States," Musk said during an event hosted by the Financial Times.

Musk said he would reverse the permanent ban if his acquisition of Twitter is completed. He added that Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey also shares his opinion that there should be no permanent bans.

Twitter agreed to be acquired by Musk in a deal worth \$44 billion, although it is still subject to shareholder approval.

Musk previously said that he would like to revolutionize Twitter's role in public debate given that free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated.

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US Expects World Oil Price to Dip to \$97 in 2023, Yet Russia Sanctions Cloud Outlook - EIA

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Global crude oil benchmark Brent could dip to as low as \$97 a barrel by next year, from Tuesday's trade of above \$100, though the dynamics around Russia's sanctioned supply makes that outlook uncertain, the US Energy Administration (EIA) said.

"We expect the Brent price will average \$107/b in 2Q22 and \$103/b in the second half of 2022. We expect the average price to fall to \$97/b in 2023," the EIA said in its Short-Term Energy Outlook. "However, this price forecast is highly uncertain. Actual price outcomes will largely depend on the degree to which existing sanctions imposed on Russia, any potential future sanctions, and independent corporate actions affect Russia's oil production or the sale of Russia's oil in the global market."

The EIA noted that its outlook, made on May 5, did not include the proposed ban by European Union nations on oil imports from Russia.

"However, the bans being reported at the time of writing would likely contribute to tighter oil balances and higher oil prices than our current forecast," the EIA said. "In addition, the degree to which other oil producers respond to current oil prices and the effects macroeconomic developments might have on global oil demand will be important for oil price formation in the coming months."

The EIA also said it had reduced Russia's oil production in this May forecast compared with April, and, as a result, it expected oil markets to be mostly balanced from 2Q22 through the end of 2023.

But the uncertainty over Russian supply meant that crude prices could see inordinate swings, the EIA warned. Prior to the sanctions, Russia produced as many as 11 million barrels of crude a day. But as of May, some 3 million barrels from that have been disrupted by the measures adopted by the West against Moscow, the agency said.

"Because oil inventories are currently low, we expect downward oil price pressures will be limited and market conditions will exist for significant price volatility," it added.

Brent hit 14-year highs of almost \$140 a barrel on March 7 as Western nations targeted Russian energy exports with a host of sanctions in relation to the crisis in Ukraine.

But crude prices have also experienced severe volatility over the past two months. While Russian supply disruptions have kept a barrel above \$100, concerns over new coronavirus lockdowns in top oil consumer China and fears that the US economy might be tipped into recession by aggressive rate hikes have also pushed crude to beneath the triple-digit mark in recent weeks.

In Tuesday's trade, Brent hit a two-week low of \$102.16. West Texas Intermediate crude, the benchmark for US crude, meanwhile, struck a two-week low of \$99.25.

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UN on EU Decision Not to Invite Russia to Syria Conference: Russia is Key Interlocutor

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russia remains one of the key players in the Syria peace settlement, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said on Tuesday, referring to the European Union's decision not to invite Moscow to the conference on Syria in Brussels. "From our standpoint, the Russian Federation is the member state of the United Nations and the permanent member of the UN Security Council, and is a key interlocutor," Haq said during a press briefing.

On Monday, the sixth European Union Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region kicked off in Brussels. The European Union has said the goal is to harness international support for Syrians who continue to face dire humanitarian crisis in Syria and abroad. The core pledging event is taking place on the last day of the conference during the EU ministerial meeting on Tuesday.

Haq said the conference is an important annual event and urged asking Brussels about the reasons not to invite Russia.

An estimated 14 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, including the 5.6 million Syrian in neighboring states, and the 6.9 million internally displaced people, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency.

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May Take Over 1 Year for US to Replenish Javelin Missiles Sent to Ukraine - Army Chief

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States may have to wait more than a year to replenish the Javelin anti-armor systems delivered to Ukraine, US Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said during a congressional hearing on Tuesday.

"I think Raytheon is trying to really accelerate whether they can come inside of a one year period. I am not sure, I think it may take a little more time," Wormuth told the US Senate Armed Services Committee.

Wormuth added there is an obsolete part that the US government will have to figure out how to work around, such as deciding whether to work on a next-generation of Stinger missiles.

The United States has delivered some 5,500 Javelin missiles that have been allocated for Ukraine. Despite the Defense Department's assurances, the Biden administration is looking at alternative plans in case there are shortages, especially due to the lack of semiconductors given that each Javelin missile requires more than 200 semiconductors to produce.

Senator Richard Blumenthal said the United States has now distributed one-third of its available Javelin missiles, and it will take a year to ramp up to full production from the current annual purchasing level of 1,000 per year. Blumenthal estimated it could take up to 32 months to

replenish the stocks. Defense contractor Raytheon said it will probably not be until 2023-2024 before they can fully replenish the supplies of both, Javelin and Stinger missiles.

The Javelin FMG-148 is a man-portable anti-armor guided missile system, manufactured by a joint venture between Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, with a range of up to 2.5 miles and infrared technology that allows the user to seek cover immediately after firing.

On the issue of replenishing Stinger missiles, Wormuth said the United States has not had an open production line for some time but there are still some Stingers the US military can provide to Ukraine.

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Pentagon Says Russia Has Used Between 10-12 Hypersonic Weapons in Ukraine

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russia has used between 10 and 12 hypersonic weapons in Ukraine since the beginning of its special military operation in the country, a senior US defense official said on Tuesday.

"We don't have a perfect count, but we would assess that this time now, 76 days in, probably between 10 and 12 [missiles]," the official said during a press briefing.

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Pentagon Says First Mi-17 Helicopter of Second Batch Going Into Ukraine Today

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The first Mi-17 helicopter of the second batch of the Soviet-era aircraft committed by the Biden administration to Ukraine is going into the country on Tuesday, a senior US defense official said.

"I can say that of these extra 11 Mi-17s that we talked about, the first one of those 11 is going in today," the official told a briefing.

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Russian Activists in New York Visiting Veterans to Wish Them Happy Victory Day

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) – Activists of the Russian-speaking community in New York are visiting Soviet WWII veterans living in the state to wish them a happy Victory Day, group member Anton Konev told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"On May 9 and today we are congratulating our veterans of the Great Patriotic War and survivors of the Leningrad siege of 1941-1944. Victory Day has always been very special for them, and we are delivering them small tokens of our appreciation," Konev said. He expressed regret that now there are fewer and fewer veterans left. "Last year, we had eight veterans in our cities of Albany and Schenectady, and now only four," he added. Konev called them the last remaining representatives of the generation of winners. These people are very happy that somebody comes to congratulate them. "One lady told me that nobody wished her a happy Victory Day. "How can we forget those who survived the worst years in history? We are able to live today because of their heroism," he said. Though the war ended 77 years ago, the psychological trauma has not been healed, he added. "The Victory Day is a happy day, but it also brings memories, the memories of the cost of the war. It is very painful. Veterans feel pride, but they also feel pain. This is a very hard and very special day for them," Konev noted. "It is not a glorious celebration that we have in some other holidays. This is a very mixed emotional day." Russia and many former Soviet republics celebrate Victory Day on May 9. Major Russian cities conducted military parades to mark the 77th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. V-day events also took place across the US, including in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Cincinnati and other cities.

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US Has 'No Indication' That Russia Uses Hypersonic Weapons in Odessa - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States has no indication that Russia has used hypersonic weapons in Odessa, a US Defense Department official told reporters on Tuesday. "No indication that we have seen hypersonics have been used in Odessa," the official said. On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. Russia said that the aim of its special operation is to demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and that only military infrastructure is being targeted.

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Biden Says Administration Discussing Next Steps on Trump's China Tariffs

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday his administration is discussing possibly rescinding some of the Trump-era trade tariffs imposed on Chinese goods in order to help deal with inflation.

"We're discussing that right now, we're looking at what will have the most positive impact," Biden said during a press conference.

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Astronauts, Cosmonauts on Board Space Station Focus on Mission, Common Things - ESA

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Astronauts and Russian cosmonauts onboard the International Space Station (ISS) are focusing on their mission and the things they share in common, Samantha Cristoforetti of ESA said on Tuesday.

"We certainly try to focus on the mission before us and all the things that we have in common, you know, our passion for space, our commitment to this mission and to the Space station program but also you know all the things that bind human beings, you know, all over the world- the love for families, for children, for friends and that's what we cherish and celebrate together," Cristoforetti said when asked whether they are avoiding the subject of Ukraine onboard the ISS. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said earlier that he has full confidence Russia will extend its cooperation with the United States on the ISS based on the continuing close cooperation and warm personal relations between crews from both countries and their control teams back on earth.

Nelson explained he based his confidence on the long and unbroken record of cooperation, partnership and friendship between Soviet and Russian cosmonauts and US astronauts in space for almost half a century.

Nelson also recalled that when veteran Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, commander of the Russian crew on the joint Apollo-Soyuz mission in 1975 who died in 2019 at the age of 85, his US counterpart and then lifelong friend astronaut Thomas Stafford was one of the pall bearers at his funeral.

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Biden Says Looking for Ways to Get Ukrainian Grain to Markets Amid Rising Food Costs

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States is looking into ways to bring Ukrainian grain to global markets in an effort to offset rising food prices and inflation, President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"Ukraine has 20 million tons of grain in storage in silos right now. We're trying to figure out how to get it out of the country to market to reduce prices around the world," Biden said during remarks on inflation.

The US is working with European partners on the effort, Biden added.

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UN Has 'Credible Information' on Ukrainian Troops Torturing Russian Prisoners - Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has credible information about Ukrainian troops torturing Russian prisoners, the head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Matilda Bogner, said on Tuesday.

"We have received credible information of torture, ill-treatment and incommunicado detention by Ukrainian Armed Forces of prisoners of war belonging to the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups," Bogner said in a press release. "We continue to see the publication of videos, which show inhumane treatment, including prisoners from both sides being coerced to make statements, apologies and confessions, and other forms of humiliation."

Bogner said this torture violates fundamental rules of international humanitarian law.

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Al-Qaeda, ISKP Terror Groups Will Be Set for External Attacks in About Year - US Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and Al-Qaeda terror groups (banned in Russia) will have reconstituted external attack capabilities from Afghanistan within approximately a year's time, US Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier said on Tuesday.

"We assess ISIS [Islamic State] probably a year, slightly longer, and longer for Al-Qaeda,"

Berrier said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on global threats.

The groups' presence in Afghanistan has purportedly began to reemerge in the wake of the US departure and Taliban takeover of the country.

In April, ISKP attacked an educational facility and vehicle in Mazar-i-Sharif, killing at least nine people and injuring 13. The group, which has been operating in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan since 2015, has claimed responsibility for multiple terror attacks.

US Special Representative Tom West said earlier this year that he believes the Taliban to be sincere in their efforts to counter ISKP in Afghanistan. However, former US Central Command chief Kenneth McKenzie also said that ISKP will be a tough target for the Taliban.

McKenzie assessed the strength of ISKP to be a couple thousand fighters, but added that they are recruiting and have been infused with individuals from Pul-e-Charkhi and Parwan prisons.

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First Lady Jill Biden, Others Not Entirely Safe on Ukraine Visits - US Intel Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - First Lady Jill Biden and other top US officials who have visited Ukraine in recent weeks could not be guaranteed complete safety on their trips, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier said on Tuesday.

"I would not say that, no," Berrier said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing when asked about whether Jill Biden and other top US officials were entirely safe during their visits to Ukraine. "I don't think we can ever guarantee anything 100%."

Jill Biden made an unannounced visit to the western Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod on Sunday, where she visited a public school being used as a temporary shelter. She also met with her Ukrainian counterpart, Olena Zelenska, who made her first public appearance since the beginning of Russia's special operation in Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited Ukraine in April, where they met with Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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US Labor Market at Tightest Since WWII Due to Supply-Demand Imbalance - Yellen

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The US labor market is at its tightest since the end of World War II due to supply-demand imbalances, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Tuesday.

"The labor market is, arguably, tight. This is the largest supply-demand imbalance as we have seen in US post-war history," Yellen said, testifying before a Senate hearing.

Joblessness among Americans reached a record high of 14.8% in April 2020, with the loss of some 20 million jobs in the aftermath of the coronavirus breakout that year.

Jobs recovery has, however, been stellar over the past year, with the unemployment rate moving down to 3.6% at the end of April. A jobless rate of 4% or below is regarded by the Federal Reserve as maximum employment.

Private employers in the United States added 247,000 jobs in April, just about half of March levels and the smallest in two years as the labor market hovered at full employment, private payrolls processor ADP said last week.

Job cuts in the United States also rose for a second month in a row in April as employers assessed costs and the growing risk of inflation in a labor market that has mostly seen record demand for workers over the past year, employment tracker Challenger, Gray & Christmas said. Aside from its turnaround from the pandemic, the US labor market is experiencing one of the greatest transformations ever as COVID-19 measures upended working trends, putting employees' demands above those of employers.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has also expressed confidence that the labor market, which added a record 1.7 million jobs in the first three months of 2022, would help the central bank meet its objective of balancing economic growth and soaring inflation with higher interest rates.

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US Envoy McCain Predicts World Food Crisis That Could Kill Millions of People

(Updates with more details, background in paras 3-8)

WASHINGTON, May 9 (Sputnik) - The US ambassador to the United Nations agencies in Rome on Tuesday projected that the world is on the path toward a very serious food crisis that could kill millions of people.

"We are extraordinarily close," Cindy McCain said, when asked how close the world is to a food crisis. "We are looking at famine in the large portion of the world. We are also looking at food prices skyrocketing ... We are going to be faced with a very serious crisis, we already are, but this could move into the kinds of things with progressing of famine [that will] not just disrupt the world but it will kill millions of people. That's what we are to be faced with right now."

The time line for the global food crisis depend on whether Russia decided to stop its operation in Ukraine , McCain noted.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Russia and Ukraine were among the top global exporters of various types of staple foods, including wheat and corn, in 2021, while Russia was also a leading exporter of nitrogen fertilizers, the second major supplier of potassium fertilizers and the third largest supplier of phosphorus fertilizers.

The organization has noted that Ukraine's food production is being threatened by factors such as disruption of logistics, loss of access to agricultural lands, labor shortages, damage to crops due to hostilities, and destruction of food system assets and infrastructure.

In addition, Western sanctions on Russia have undermined the country's sales of agricultural products abroad and prompted Moscow to retaliate by freezing fertilizer exports and other relevant products.

As a result, global food prices soared to record highs in March and the International Monetary Fund warned in April that global food prices would likely rise further as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, sanctions against Russia and Belarus as well as climate issues.

On Thursday, the United States appointed agriculturalist Cary Fowler as Special Envoy for Food Security to address recent disruptions to global supply chains caused by climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis.

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US Says Russia Attacked Commercial Satellite Networks in Ukraine in Late February

WASHINGTON, May 9 (Sputnik) - The United States has determined that Russia carried out cyberattacks against commercial satellite communications networks in late February to disrupt Ukraine's command, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday.

"Today, in support of the European Union and other partners, the United States is sharing publicly its assessment that Russia launched cyber attacks in late February against commercial

satellite communications networks to disrupt Ukrainian command and control during the invasion, and those actions had spillover impacts into other European countries," Blinken said in a statement. "The activity disabled very small aperture terminals in Ukraine and across Europe. This includes tens of thousands of terminals outside of Ukraine that, among other things, support wind turbines and provide Internet services to private citizens."

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US Assesses Russia-Ukraine Conflict as 'Stalemate' - Defense Intelligence Chief

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States assesses the status of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as a stalemate that could possibly be drawn out for a long time, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier said during a congressional hearing on global threats on Tuesday.

"I think I would characterize it as the Russians aren't winning and the Ukrainians aren't winning, and we're at a bit of a stalemate here," Berrier told the US Senate Armed Services Committee. The stalemate may be drawn out for even longer if Russia does not decide to declare war and mobilize additional troops to aid in the operation, Berrier added.

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Putin to Use Nuclear Weapons Only if Faced With Existential Threat - US Intelligence Chief

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - Russian President Vladimir Putin would use nuclear weapons only if he perceives an existential threat to the Russian state but can resort to nuclear rhetoric to deter Washington from sending military aid to Ukraine, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines said on Tuesday.

"We believe that Moscow continues to use nuclear rhetoric to deter the United States and the West from increasing lethal aid to Ukraine," Haines told a US Senate hearing. "We otherwise continue to believe the President Putin would probably only authorize the use of nuclear weapons if he perceived an existential threat to the Russian state or regime."

Haines also said she believes Putin may try to deter Washington from assisting Ukraine by conducting another large-scale exercise involving intercontinental missiles, heavy bombers, or strategic submarines.

Russia has repeatedly stated that it has never threatened and does not threaten anyone with its nuclear arsenal, while Kiev was the first to talk about canceling the Budapest memorandum of 1994, according to which Ukraine renounces its nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees from the other three signatories - Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom.

In March, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the United States, Turkey and neighboring states could become guarantors of Ukraine's security in a new agreement that would replace the Budapest Memorandum.

On February 24, Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine after the breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk requested help to defend them from intensifying attacks by Ukrainian troops. The Russian Ministry of Defense said the operation is solely targeting Ukrainian military infrastructure and the civilian population is not in danger.

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US Does Not See Reason to Be Concerned About Russian Nuke Use - Senior Intel Official

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United States does not currently see a reason to be concerned about Russian tactical nuclear weapons usage, Defense Intelligence Agency Director Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier said on Tuesday.

"Right now we do not see that, and I think that's a huge warning issue for us and something that we're very focused on," Berrier said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on global threats when asked about whether there is a serious or immediate prospect of nuclear weapons usage.

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UNGA Elects Czech Republic to UN Rights Council Seat Vacated After Russia's Withdrawal

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday elected the Czech Republic to take the seat on the UN Human Rights Council that was vacated after Russia's withdrawal.

The Czech Republic was the sole candidate in the by-election, which came after Russia ended its membership in the Human Rights Council on April 7, before its term ended, following the General Assembly's vote to suspend it from the body.

The country will retain the seat on the council until December 31, 2023.

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US Envoy Predicts World Food Crisis That Could Kill Millions of People

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US Cyber Security Office Announces 3 New Senior Appointments - White House

WASHINGTON, May 10 (Sputnik) - The Office of the National Cyber Director (ONCD) has announced three new appointments to senior positions, the White House said in a press release on Tuesday.

"Today, the Office of the National Cyber Director announced Kemba Walden as the first principal deputy national cyber director and Neal Higgins and Rob Knake as deputy national cyber directors," the release said.

Walden is an attorney with extensive experience in government and the private sector. She came to ONCD from Microsoft, where she served as an Assistant General Counsel in the company's Digital Crimes Unit, the release said.

"Higgins comes to ONCD from the CIA, where he served as associate deputy director for digital innovation, responsible for CIA's cyber operations, open source collection, data science, and secure global communications," the release said.

Higgins also served as CIA's Director of Congressional Affairs and as deputy chief of the WikiLeaks Task Force, it added.

Knake is a cybersecurity policy expert who was previously a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, a fellow at the Harvard Belfer Center's Cyber Project and an adviser to cybersecurity startups and Fortune 500 companies. During the Obama Administration, Knake served in the cyber directorate at the National Security Council, according to the release.